

v.55, no. 5 (Oct 2004)

# SACRED JOURNEY



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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER~OCTOBER 2004

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# SACRED JOURNEY<sup>®</sup>

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

*The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is*

*to encourage and support*

*a spiritual orientation to life,*

*to promote the practice of*

*prayer,*

*meditation,*

*and service to others,*

*and to help bring about*

*a deeper spirit of unity*

*among humankind.*

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## "We Are Standing at a Precipice"



These are the words of Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Director of the Shalom Center in Philadelphia. The Center is a "network of American Jews who draw on Jewish tradition and spirituality to seek peace, pursue justice, heal the earth, and build community." Their description includes these words:

We believe that the rhythm of work and rest, doing and being, acting and reflecting, acquiring and sharing, is one of the most basic Jewish wisdoms.

We see that the modern world is out of kilter: so addicted to the technology of making, doing, producing, consuming—and so contemptuous of contemplation, community, and family—that this addiction is endangering both our society and the web of life on earth.

So we apply the ancient wisdom of the healing spiral rhythm of Work and Shabbat, Doing and Being, to: transforming top-down globalization into planetary community; reshaping the twin diseases of disemployment and overwork into sacred work and sacred rest; protecting the planet's web of life; reshaping a sexual ethics to affirm both joy and responsibility; requiring corporate social responsibility; advancing peace and rejecting militarism.

In a recent letter to members, Rabbi Waskow explained "The Tent of Abraham," a statement on peacemaking that the Center has worked out with Jews, Christians, and Muslims: "(It is) the call

by the families of Abraham to heal the agonies that are now bleeding our peoples. Literally bleeding. It addresses both the US-Iraq and Israel-Palestine arenas in a new way. And it speaks to the misdeeds of ALL sides in these wars and the interreligious violence beyond them."

Here is the opening of the peace statement. Please keep it in mind as you read our selection of writings in this issue. With the age-old entwinement of religion and politics more intricate and delicate than ever, these writings have everything to do with the ever-increasing need for understanding and acceptance among **all** people of **all** faiths everywhere in our precious world.

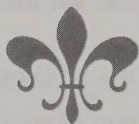
### THE TENT OF ABRAHAM

We are members of the families of Abraham—Muslims, Christians, Jews. Our traditions teach us to have compassion, seek justice, and pursue peace for all peoples. . . . Today our hearts are broken by the violence poured out upon the peoples of that region (the greater Middle East). From our heartbreak at these destructive actions, we intend to open our hearts more fully to each other and to the suffering of all peoples. In the name of the One God Whom we all serve and celebrate, we condemn all these forms of violence. To end the present wars and to take serious steps toward the peace that all our traditions demand of us, we call on governments and on the leaders of all religious and cultural communities to act.

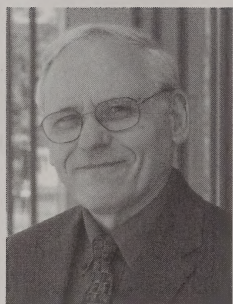
According to tradition, Abraham kept his tent open in all four directions, the more easily to share his food and water with travelers from anywhere. In that spirit, we welcome all those who thirst and hunger for justice, peace, and dignity.

—Signed by: Rev. Bob Edgar, head of the National Council of Churches; Sr. Joan Chittister OSB, past president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious; and Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, head of the Islamic Society of North America; Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Shalom Center — **and YOU?**

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT WUTHNOW



### The Intersection of Politics and Religion (part two)



*With debates in full swing on a variety of issues that mix religion and politics, two Princeton scholars have written new books examining the relationship between Americans' religious beliefs and political actions. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow investigates religious organizations' contributions to American society, and the controversy over whether the government should support them, in *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Society*. Professor of Religion Jeffrey Stout, in *Democracy and Tradition*, offers his vision for a public political discourse that embraces rather than suppresses a variety of religious viewpoints. Both books were recently published by Princeton University Press.*

*In our last issue we talked with Jeffrey Stout (see *SACRED JOURNEY*, August 2004, pg. 18, for part one). This month we continue the discussion with Robert Wuthnow. In these interviews, Wuthnow and Stout speak about the influence of religion on public policy and politics.*



Professor Wuthnow, the Gerhard Andlinger '52 Professor of Social Sciences and director of the Center for the Study of Religion, has taught at Princeton since 1976. His previous books include *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves*, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* and *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities*. Wuthnow spoke with Princeton Weekly Bulletin writer Patricia Allen.

**Patricia Allen:** One of your goals when you began work on *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Society* was to provide solid research to contribute to the debate on federal funding of faith-based programs. What was your most compelling finding?

**Wuthnow:** Policy-makers obfuscate the distinction between congregations and faith-based organizations. It surprised me that policy-makers don't often make that distinction because congregations function quite differently from more specialized faith-based organizations.

Faith-based organizations are Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, Lutheran Services; these organizations are really where the action is. These faith-based service organizations actually run pretty much like nonsectarian service organizations. They are usually set up as nonprofit organizations, and they are separately incorporated from churches or congregations. There is a legal separation. That's the way the professional staffs and volunteers see it, and that's the way the clients see it. It's usually an arm's length transaction. If clients go to them because they need a wheelchair, they don't care if it's a faith-based organization. The professionals there usually don't talk

about their faith, because it's not a professional thing to do to impose that on a client.

Congregations are different, because they are in the business of making people into Christians or Jews or Muslims or whatever it is they are about. The government will run into trouble if they start giving money to congregations. There are some faith-based organizations, such as Prison Fellowship and Teen Challenge, that function like congregations and they are about making people Christians or better Christians. And government, in my view, should not be spending money to make people Christians.

**Can the federal government provide a viable program to support faith-based services that is inclusive of all religious traditions?**

The way the Bush administration's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives program is set up, any religious organization can apply. The problem is that about the only programs the administrators have given money to are Christian organizations. That has been one of the criticisms.

Some of the backers of faith-based organizations don't seem to quite understand that this has to be pluralistic. They are quite willing to spend money on Prison Fellowship and Teen Challenge—both are effective Christian organizations. But if it's the black Muslims in prison doing exactly the same type of work, they are skittish about that. They are dealing with some of these issues now in the courts.

**Do you think the American public is still interested in the religious identity and practices of political candidates?**



I do think the public cares a lot about candidates' religious affiliations. It's surprising because if we go back in our history to the Eisenhower, Nixon and Kennedy years, especially with John F. Kennedy, we thought a person's private religion should be private. Kennedy made a big point of saying that.

But now, religion is out there. When one looks at surveys, somewhere around three-quarters of the public think that candidates should talk about their personal faith and that religious leaders should talk about their political views. That has been a very divisive factor. There are, in fact, identifiable blocks of voters who think religion is absolutely the litmus test.

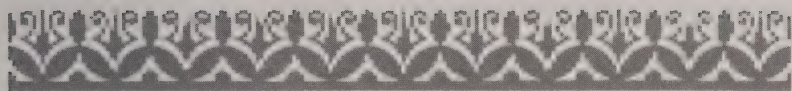
**How have Americans' recognition of religion and religious ideals changed after the terrorists' attacks on Sept. 11 and during the war on terrorism?**

The post-9/11 period has pushed the United States as a culture into growing recognition of religious pluralism, both in the world at large and in the United States. We are much more aware of Muslims in the world. Slowly and gradually, we are becoming aware that there is a substantial Hindu population in the United States, a Buddhist population and so forth. That has created a very acute tension within our culture between a past in which many Americans felt comfortable saying, "This is a Christian country. It was founded on Christian principles, and democracy was rooted in Christianity. We were a strong nation because we believe in God." One side of President Bush believes very strongly in that. We have a Christian understanding of the nation—"civil religion" is what some people call it.

On the other hand, we have the tradition of civil liberties. We say, "Sure, if you're a Muslim, we respect your faith." That was President Bush's statement shortly after 9/11. We understand at some level that we should treat people equally. But when push comes to shove, it's not quite clear which of those understandings of America is going to come out. Our rhetoric about respecting religious diversity rings false if we don't really understand those other faiths.

The problem is that there is really no concerted effort in most communities to do anything about this, to promote more understanding. That's the conversation that needs to happen. Religious organizations need to encourage that conversation. Unfortunately, they don't seem to be doing very much of it. But in the meantime, the news media help a little bit and community organizations do. This is a place where colleges and universities have a major role to play in promoting those conversations among the diverse people on campuses and in communities.

*This interview first appeared in the Princeton Weekly Bulletin, May 31, 2004.*



## Everything Up to Now . . . A Spiritual Autobiography

Lauren Van Ham

*For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us God's sons and daughters and set our whole being free.*

*~ Romans 8:22-23 (Today's English version)*

Since pursuing my call to ministry at ChI (The Chaplaincy Institute for the Arts and Interfaith Ministries), and throughout my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) residency to train as a hospital chaplain, I have been asked repeatedly to specify, detail, and explain my beliefs. It is a necessary dialogue, but I have an aversion to explaining the process. To satisfy the hearts and minds of those simply trying to identify my "category," or brand me with a recognized label, I have tried to develop clear and concise responses. The more compelling questions for me, however, are these: What does it mean to be an Interfaith minister? Can one

*Rev. Lauren Van Ham serves as a hospital chaplain in San Francisco, CA. As an Interfaith minister, she celebrates many cultures and diverse beliefs by creating interfaith rituals and wedding ceremonies. Some of Lauren's joys include feeling sun on her face, spontaneous acts of silliness, and the smell of Ponderosa pines.*



truly be Interfaith? Four years of bearing the Interfaith title haven't given me a definitive answer. I have come to feel strongly that, ultimately, an answer isn't the point. My more stubborn, less-than-enlightened mind often gets gripped by the notion that a definition is mandatory in order to still the constant yearning of my soul. But, alas, that is my mind, and my soul knows better than to believe that the yearning (or "groaning" as Romans 8 suggests above) would cease were there a theological theorem developed that proved or disproved Interfaith's theological and/or philosophical viability.

### **The Blessing of My Church "Village" and Community**

My parents, one a minister, the other a psychologist, modeled spiritual growth as a lifelong endeavor, practiced through relationship to God, others, and nature. To honor and feed our individual needs, while also teaching the importance of tolerance, my parents encouraged my brother and me to explore diverse cultures, faith traditions, and societal beliefs. With the help of passionate naturalists and wise, indigenous teachers, we learned, each summer in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, to walk reverently and humbly in the awesome offerings of nature.

When I turned thirteen, I was baptized at a Coming of Age ceremony. Combining the Jewish tradition of bat mitzvah with the Christian rite of baptism, I professed my faith by sharing my thoughts on growing up and on my growing relationship with God at a celebratory gathering of family and friends.

### **The Grace of Permission: Exploring Panentheism**

In the beginning, my spiritual practice got its exercise in the church, but I also began to discern how God was present in all the corners of my life. My love for singing,

dancing, and the theatre was revealing to me a new form of sacred communication.

So it was in this way, learning in the rich and inviting environments of my home, nature, the church, and the theatre that I came to see myself as an extension of the divine, a branch on the Tree of Life.

### **Searching for Cosmic Reality in a Material World**

It was a leap of faith when I accepted an invitation to pursue music theatre in the drama department at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—and it was a rude awakening to learn that for many (if not most) of my young-adult peers, spiritual growth was not a significant pull in their lives! My heart sank; I doubted my original interpretation of God's desires for my life. I graduated and moved to New York City feeling very uncertain and discontent.

I spent a period of years fraught with worry, searching, sorting, and sifting. I felt completely disoriented by an overall lack of community. My hunger for social transformation and ministry was not being realized in the world of entertainment. Nor was it being furthered in the life of the church.

I toured the country performing in a musical I loved. I danced with a company-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I worked as co-director of the children's and youth ministries at a Fifth Avenue church. I began working with a spiritual director and prayerfully considered seminary, but hit dead-ends continually when faced with the institutions' insistence that I choose a denomination, let alone a religious tradition! I wanted to respect these distinguished theological centers, but I didn't feel recognized as an artist, or as a woman; and I didn't

feel respected as one openly questioning the absoluteness of Christianity as The Way.

### **A Homecoming: Interfaith/Multifaith Riches**

I love Jesus. I'm humbled by His teachings on love, and inspired when I encounter, in context, what a radical justice-seeker He was. Jesus, of course, didn't call Himself a "Christian." And I can only believe that the suffering of Jesus is compounded today by the violent, destructive, and tragic acts of Christians misinterpreting His teachings or attempting to defend His name.

Somewhat guiltily, I realized I wasn't going to find a way to heal my impatience and frustration with the church by attending a traditional seminary, so in the fall of 1998 I moved to California to get my master's degree at the University of Creation Spirituality/Naropa-Oakland (*founded by Matthew Fox*). At Naropa, I was exposed to texts, languages, rituals—all so different from what I'd grown up with! There were initial moments that tested my "comfort zone," but ultimately, the provocations cracked me open and left me feeling at home, liberated. Life's ordinary moments were infused with the Sacred and my understanding of God grew exponentially.

I could end the story here, summarizing that I found my call, went on to study at an Interfaith seminary, and trained to be a chaplain, but I would be cheating the reader and myself out of what is happening in my present spiritual evolution, the Cutting Edge.

### **What's Happening Now**

The most revolutionary thought in my current understanding and practice of co-creating with the Beloved is that there is really so little that I must "do."



I don't thoroughly understand this, and for it to be true, my concept of God must continue to expand in significant, nearly negative ways. What I mean is that, in my own practice of Becoming, I bring my suffering, my doubt, and my confusion. Inevitably, in such moments, I intensify the situation by comparing myself to others, or to a Higher Ideal, wishing that I was someone (or something!) else. To drop all of that, and to come into my authentic experience of the "creaturehood called Lauren," God must cease to be something, and be Pure Mystery. When I externalize or personify God as One to whom I must actively appeal, impress, or please, I become a doer, completely missing the holiness inherent in accepting the present situation as is—as another facet of God, even if it feels unpleasant. It is only through this practice of acceptance that I stand a chance of entering the Oneness of God's compassionate existence.

This realization is likely why, in recent years, I have been so drawn to Eastern thought and religion. My most recent pull to Buddhism is through Vipassana meditation, a practice that emphasizes Emptiness as Path. Buddhism invites me to explore my authenticity, my "Buddha Nature," which is also who I am as a participant in the Body of Christ.

### **Conclusion . . . At Least for This Moment**

My spiritual evolution circles me away from what is familiar and makes me stretch to the foreign and mysterious. Miraculously, after falling to my knees in confusion and kissing the ground in spite of it all, God simply whispers, "Yes, Lauren, and there is room for this too." It is a very un-intellectual process, and I appreciate that my explanation as such could be extremely

unsatisfying for one who finds connection with God through knowledge, for my spiritual autobiography, as it were, is not an academic document. I imagine that my discomfort with the uncertainty is a bit of why I have it, so that God can hold me lovingly on the cutting edge.

*Remember that with every step, you are nearing God, and God too, when you take one step towards Him, takes ten towards you . . . When the road ends and the Goal is gained, the pilgrim finds that he has traveled only from himself to himself, and that the way was long and lonesome, but that the God whom he reached was all the while in him, around him, with him, and beside him.*

*~ Sathya Sai Baba*



Louise Hutner



# ILLUMINATIONS



*NOTE: Our Illuminations for this issue are taken from Reverend Lauren Van Ham's "Spiritual Autobiography" (presented on the pages immediately preceding this). Rev. Van Ham had interspersed these quotes throughout her story, but in shortening it for publication, the quotations interrupted her narrative flow. We present them here in the order in which she placed them in her story.*

For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us God's sons and daughters and set our whole being free.

*~ Romans 8:22-23*

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all I am doing. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will

not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

~ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

If the Milky Way were not within me, how should I have seen it or known it?

~ Kahlil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*

I am in love with every church and mosque and temple and any kind of shrine, because I know it is there that people say the different names of the One God.

~ Hafiz

As my prayer became more attentive and inward I had less and less to say. I finally became completely silent. I started to listen—which is even further removed from speaking. I first thought that praying entailed speaking. I then learnt that praying is hearing, not merely being silent. This is how it is, to pray does not mean to listen to oneself speaking. Prayer involves becoming silent, and being silent, and waiting until God is heard.

~ Soren Kierkegaard

My soul spoke to me and said, “The lantern which you carry is not yours, and the song that you sing was not composed within your heart, for even if you bear the light, you are not the light, and even if you are a lute fastened with strings, you are not the lute player.”

~ Kahlil Gibran, *Thoughts and Meditations*

The greatest formal talent is worthless if it does not serve a creativity which is capable of shaping a cosmos.

~ Albert Einstein

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something new; and yet it is the law of progress that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you, your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give God the benefit of believing that God's hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

~ *Teilhard de Chardin*

What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago and I do not also give birth to the son of God in my time and in my culture?

~ *Meister Eckhart*

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. Don't open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument. Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

~ *Rumi*

As swimmers dare to lie face to the sky and water bears them, as hawks rest upon air and air sustains them, so would I learn to attain freefall, and float into Creator Spirit's deep embrace, knowing no effort earns that all-surrounding grace.

~ *Denise Levertov*

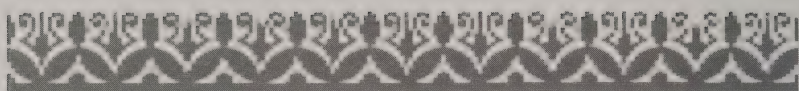


If you cannot have the conviction born from fruitful search, then take advantage of my discovery which I am so eager to share with you. I can see with the utmost clarity that you have never been, nor are, nor will be estranged from reality, that you are the fullness of perfection here and now and that nothing can deprive you of your heritage, of what you are. . . You do not know what you are, therefore you imagine yourself to be what you are not. Hence desires and fear and overwhelming despair. . . Just trust me and live by trusting in me. I shall not mislead you. . . Abandon all sense of separation, see yourself in all and act accordingly. With action, bliss will come and, with bliss, conviction. After all, you doubt yourself because you are in sorrow. Happiness—natural, spontaneous, and lasting—cannot be imagined. Either it is there or it is not. Once you begin to experience the peace, love, and happiness which need no outer causes, all your doubts will dissolve.

~ Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Remember that with every step, you are nearing God, and God too, when you take one step towards Him, takes ten towards you. . . When the road ends and the Goal is gained, the pilgrim finds that he has traveled only from himself to himself, and that the way was long and lonesome, but that the God whom he reached was all the while in him, around him, with him, and beside him.

~ Sathya Sai Baba



## Mindless Violence

Suzanne Stabile

It was July of 2002. I was seated in the back row of the Richard Rohr/Thomas Keating conference entitled "Healing Our Violence." Normally, I'm a front row kind of person, but I'm also a voracious note-taker. The ballroom was crowded and the chairs were set as close to each other as possible, so I settled for a place at the back where I had more space to write. My interest in the conference was not well defined. I am the mother of four, married to a minister, so time away alone with my husband is a gift. Fathers Rohr and Keating sounded like a good combination for almost any topic and I expected to be challenged by what they would say, but I didn't see that their topic, "Healing Our Violence," had a lot to do with me personally.

During the weekend, I filled a notebook with the thoughts and ideas that had been shared, so much so that I was tired of writing by the end of the last session. Then, as we were walking out of that huge room at the Sheraton Hotel for the last break before the closing worship, the event staff put a Thomas Merton quote on the giant screen:

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence.

At that moment I realized that this topic had everything to do with me. I was suddenly aware of an entire world of violence that I had never even recognized, much less explored. The pattern that defined my life was being described as violent. . . and by Thomas Merton.

I maneuvered my way back through the crowd to write the quote in my journal—as if I could ever forget it. My husband, Joe, and I talked about it for the next few days. The idea that behaviors I had previously seen as generous and caring and selfless could more aptly be described as violent was shocking to me, and yet the reality of that violence in my life was unmistakable. There was no denying the pattern and no doubt about the need for a response.

Newly aware of my “multitude of conflicting concerns, demands, and projects,” I took a fresh look at how I was spending my days and how my efforts were affecting those around me. In discussion with friends, Joe and I coined the phrase “mindless violence” to try to explain, both to ourselves and to others, the aggressive patterns of behavior in our daily lives that we were noticing for the first time. We heard the sarcasm that was spoken among the children. As adults in our mid-fifties, we began to hear the cynicism that defined much of the conversation among our colleagues and friends. We saw that busyness was considered a status symbol and that stress and exhaustion were signs of success. Violence was everywhere.

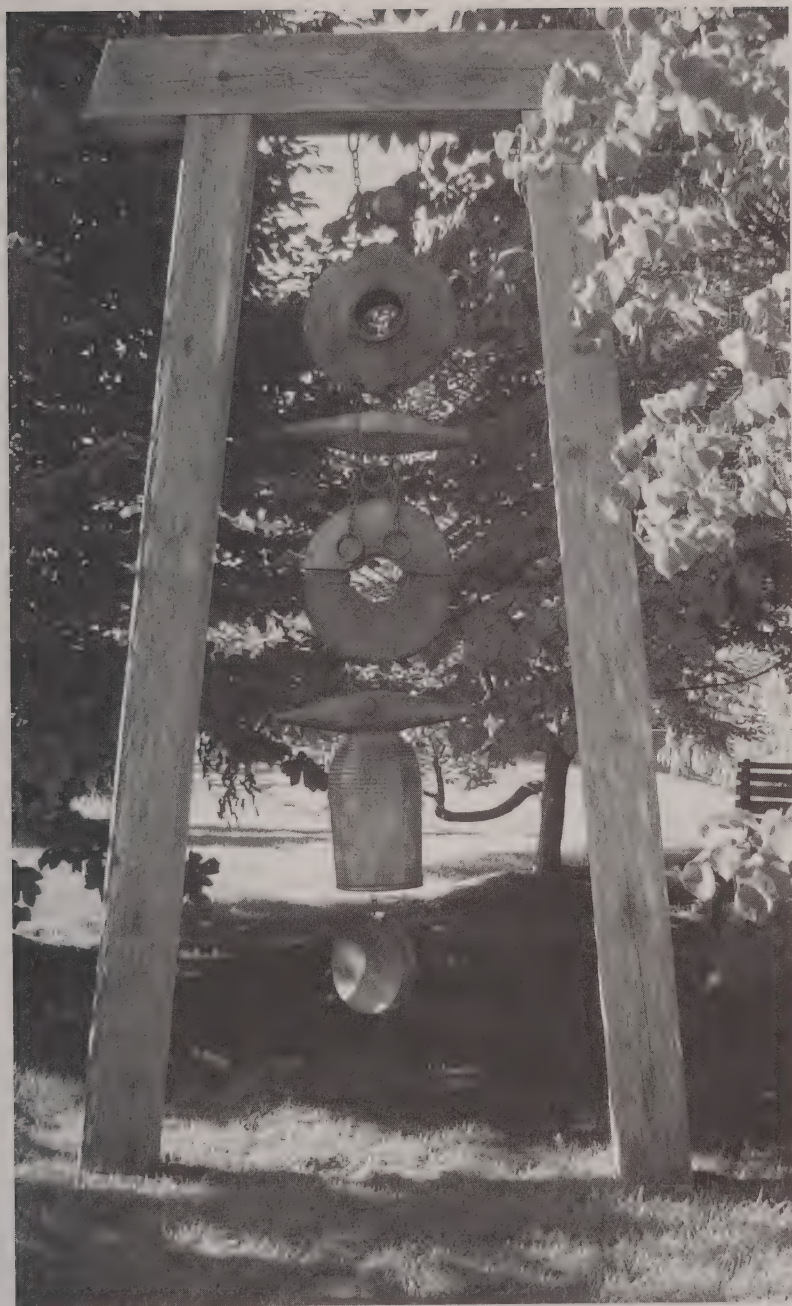
As the director of an adult retreat center, I started teaching a class entitled “Mindless Violence” with the hope of increasing awareness of what I was seeing all around me. For a year we explored movies, television, traffic, office talk, family bantering, the use of cell phones, time, technology, and the celebration of holidays. As we all




became aware of the mindless violence in our lives, we worked to counter it with mindful practices of generosity, silence, truth, loving kindness, non-violent communication, and forgiveness. There were about seventy-five participants in the classes so our opportunities for discovery and discussion were rich and plentiful. We addressed one issue a month and did our best to make the necessary adjustments in our lives. Awareness was the easy part. Changing the patterns of how we lived was the challenge.

Now, almost two years after the conference and well into our second year of the study of Mindless Violence, I see a difference in how we all live our lives. We speak more carefully. We listen more deeply. We have learned to allow others to go ahead of us without regret. We gather weekly to talk about the opportunities we had to model peace rather than aggression. The Dallas businessmen in my classes say that, although they felt vulnerable and ineffective in their workplaces when they first started practicing generosity and telling the absolute truth, success is beginning to accompany these practices as more and more people learn to trust them.

*This article was first published in the March-April 2004 issue of Radical Grace, a bi-monthly publication of the Center for Action and Contemplation ([www.cacradicalgrace.org](http://www.cacradicalgrace.org)) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*

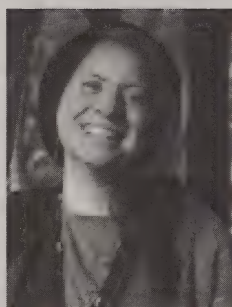


Louise Hutner



## Teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov

Marcia Prager



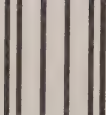
*Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov traveled the countryside of Eastern Europe in the early and mid-1700's, teaching the simple village people a path of joyous, mystical Judaism. He taught the common people that their heartfelt prayer was as exalted as that of the scholars. He taught in parables, told holy stories, healed the sick, and sang soul-opening melodies that cracked open the heavens. He taught the way of "devekut," radical attachment to God through intense love, and "hitlahavut," the inner fire of ecstatic prayer. Joined by growing numbers of disciples and followers,*

*Rabbi Marcia Prager is a Jewish Renewal teacher, artist, and storyteller. Her teaching draws from an array of traditional and modern sources in the service of an empowering affirmation of the spirit. She is Director of Professional Development for ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, and is the author of *The Path of Blessing* (Bell Tower 1998/Jewish Lights 2003), an exploration of the spiritual wisdom that lies in the Jewish practice of blessing. She serves as rabbi for the Philadelphia P'nai Or Jewish Renewal Community and Princeton P'nai Or, and teaches widely in many different Jewish and interfaith settings. Visit her web site at [www.rabbimarciaprager.com](http://www.rabbimarciaprager.com).*

*Jewish Renewal is a movement of people engaged in creating contemporary models of Jewish expression that speak to both intellect and heart in forms which embrace the full inclusion of women and the divine feminine, and which facilitate the deep healing of our relationships with each other and the earth. For more information visit [www.aleph.org](http://www.aleph.org).*



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*he sparked the movement known as Chasidism, which brought a luminescent hopefulness and holiness back into the everyday life of people all too accustomed to poverty and despair. Most importantly, he lived and taught in a way that affirmed and revealed anew the Oneness of All within the Infinite Presence of God.*

*Enjoy these teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, with special thanks to my colleague and friend Rabbi Burt Jacobson.*

~ Rabbi Marcia Prager

**The Baal Shem Tov taught, saying:**

You long for the Divine to descend upon you  
and enter your life?

Then the most important thing  
for you to know and grasp  
is that there is nothing within you

but God!

The life-giving soul within you  
is one aspect  
of the life-giving soul  
within all living and created beings.

And this great soul is itself  
the Blessed Holy One.

When you meditate on the thought  
that you are rooted in the Divine  
and then you pray to God,  
you perform a true act of unification.

**The Baal Shem Tov taught, saying:**

There are some who seek God,  
but they believe that the Divine is very far away,  
surrounded by many high walls.

And when they fail in their search  
they say:

*"I sought him but I found him not."* (Song of Songs 3:1)

Had they been wise however,  
they would have known that

*"There is no place empty of God."* (Tikkuney Zohar 57:91b)

You can find God in everything!

You can find God everywhere!

Understand this:

When you discover Divinity  
in any facet of reality  
and bind your consciousness  
to that portion of God,  
you are binding yourself  
to the All in all.

*Shema Yisrael Adonay Eloheynu, Adonay Echad!*

Comprehend with a Total Comprehension, Yisrael,  
The Infinite Eternal One is our Power,  
The Infinite Eternal One alone!



**The Baal Shem Tov taught, saying:**

When we say "The Infinite Eternal One alone!"  
we mean that nothing other than God exists  
in the whole of the Universe.

Reflect on this:

Your separate self is absolutely nothing,  
for you are really the soul that is within you,  
which is a portion of the Divine beyond.

No nothing at all exists in the universe  
but the absolute Unity which is God.

This is the teaching of the Torah  
regarding the Oneness of Being.

Nothing that exists is real in and of itself.  
The reality of any creation  
inheres in the Divinity which gives it being.

Even that which seems separate,  
cut off from God,  
is in reality wholly Divine.

**The Baal Shem Tov taught, saying:**

You may wonder "Who am I?"

How could anyone like me damage or mend  
anything in heaven or on earth?

How could my small deeds affect God?"

But this kind of stubborn doubting  
gives free reign to unholy habits of mind.

You tell yourself:

*"All will be well with me,  
even though I walk with stubbornness of heart."  
(Deut 29:18)*

But in truth this is not so,  
for through your deeds  
you can bind yourself to God,

as it is written:

*"You shall be able to walk in God's very own paths." (Deut  
28:9)*

When you act compassionately here on earth,  
you arouse God's compassion beyond,  
throughout all the Divine realms.

*~ Sefer Baal Shem Tov*



## A Blessing Service for Those Who Minister

Deborah Hanus

Several years ago, a friend attended a blessing service with me for volunteers in our outreach program. It was a simple service conducted at the close of Mass whereby those blessed were sent out in the community to do the work to which they felt called. My friend, not a member of my faith, turned to me and said, "I wish we had something like this at our church for those of us who minister individually in the community. We have to go naked into the world!"

To go into ministry without the blessing of a community can be like standing naked and unprotected in what is often a difficult and lonesome endeavor. Very often as institutional churches, we overlook the many ministries that people choose to do outside of those specifically designated by our denominations. Many of us work in centers, schools, hospitals, and jails in paid and unpaid positions that spring not from our local church but from other initiatives. My friend, a chaplain for a local hospice organization, felt the need to be connected in some way with others who ministered on an individual basis in the community. He wanted to be clothed with a spiritual mantle that comes from being part of a praying

*Deborah Hanus, D.Min., is Director of the Center for Spiritual Growth and the Contemplative Life, located at 230 East Travis St., San Antonio, Texas 78205. Phone: 210-354-1002. Email: [CFSG@idworld.net](mailto:CFSG@idworld.net).*

community, and knowing that there exist others like him who minister outside official church ministries.

I took his need to heart and suggested to our community, at the ecumenical center where I work, that we create a blessing service for anyone who does ministry in any capacity or in any setting. We wanted to provide a time and space where each person could connect their individual ministry with that of all ministry done in the name of God. Our first blessing service for ministry was set for the following September. We chose the fall season because this is the time of year that many ministries get underway again. It is also the time of harvest, when the laborers go into the field to bring in what God's bounty has produced.

Everyone is given their gifts and talents for the good of the world and it does no good for any of us to hoard these to ourselves. God's bounty of love is meant for the good of the whole world. Let us all ask God that we be generous enough to share God's love of the world.

## **AN INTERRELIGIOUS BLESSING SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO MINISTER IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS**

### **Preparing the Environment:**

In the center of a space large enough for people to stand in a circle, place a small, low table. Drape the table with a festive cloth. On the cloth place as large a globe as you can find. If you are not able to find a globe, place an opened map of your city or area. At the center of the table, place a single candle which the leader will light at the beginning of the service. Be sure to include a lighting wand. Nearby, place a basket of enough small, individual candles for all those who attend. Provide copies of music and of this prayer service. Around the table, place green, blooming plants.



## **The Blessing Service:**

Invite everyone to stand in a circle as able. Provide a few chairs for those who may not wish to stand. When everyone has gathered, light the single candle at the center of the table, the focal point.

**Leader (standing as part of the circle):** Good and caring God, You who created us and who cares for us by giving us this world and one another, we gather here today to praise You for Your goodness and to ask Your help in our participation in Your work in the world. Open our hearts and our minds to the remembrance of Your presence in our sisters and brothers. Give us a share in Your compassion as we care for the needs, as we share the burdens, and as we rejoice in the happiness of those whom we are called to serve.

**Gathering Song or Chant:** If you do not have a musician or leader of song, use one of the simple chants on a CD. Some suggestions include:

Psalm 145, "I Will Praise Your Name, Glory and Praise," V. 1, OCP Publications

"Bless Thou the Gifts," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 1989

"Bless the Lord," Sing to God: Taize, GIA Publications

"O My Strength," *Holy Ground: Mantras and Chants for Reflection*, by Monica Brown

## **Responsive Reading and Ritual:**

**Reader One (Christianity):** We ask for the grace to do to others as we would have done to us.

**All:** Help us to notice what needs to be done.

**Reader Two** (Judaism): Turn us away from what is hurtful to others, for on this rests the whole of the Torah.

**All:** Let not our indifference cause others to suffer.

**Reader Three** (Islam): Help us to reject for others what we reject for ourselves.

**All:** Remind us that everyone is in need of loving care.

**Leader:** Let each of us take a moment to think about the ministry to others to which we are called this year. Remember how you came to be called to service and your need for God's presence in your ministry.

Now, as you wish, let us go around the circle and have each of you tell us the ministry which will engage you.

**Leader** (after everyone has spoken): Gracious God, you hear how Your many children are responding to Your call to be of service to one another. Give each of us the help we need to be good servants in your name.

**Reader Four:** Your world, Your creation, and Your people are too often in pain, too often suffer, too often are forgotten by the strong and the indifferent. Awake within each of us our responsibility for our neighbor and our world. Help us to see You in each person we approach, help us to respect each person's dignity and to minister in respectful ways to them and to the earth.

(As the people respond, the Leader can lift up the globe, or if the group is small, the globe could be passed around the circle.)

**All:** Full of love for all things in the world,

Practicing virtue in order to benefit others,  
This person alone is happy. (Buddhism)

**Reader Five:**

If we forget, who will remember?  
If we do not respond, who will go?  
But we are weak, we are fearful,  
we need You, Loving God,  
and we need one another.  
Help us, stay with us, give us strength,  
and give us joy in Your service.  
We are blessed, and we are sent.  
We thank you for this opportunity to be light,  
hope, and compassion for the world!

(The Leader gives a candle to each person. As the gathering sings, using the songs above or instrumental music, each person lights their candle and returns to their place in the circle.)

**Leader:** Now, having turned inward for strength and blessing from one another and from God, let us turn outward toward the world, the community, and the people in whom and with whom we serve God.

(Everyone turns outward, holding their candle high.)

**Leader:** Let us all say Aum! Amin! Amen!

**All respond:** Aum! Amin! Amen!

Participants are invited to keep their candles as a remembrance of God's ongoing presence with them as they minister throughout the year.

# P O E T R Y



## *Collecting Light*

Deborah Gordon Cooper

*I see the way the chickadees  
take turns at the feeder.  
I watch a neighbor take  
her husband's hand.  
I see the way the sun will  
find  
the only interruption  
in dark clouds,  
to toss this amber light  
across the pines.  
I see a row of cars  
stop on the road,  
until the orange cat  
has safely crossed,  
then take off slowly, should  
she change her mind.*

*Deborah Gordon Cooper has used poetry extensively in her work as a hospice/hospital chaplain and has conducted workshops on the interfacing of poetry and spirituality. She has had three collections of her poetry published and she and her husband, who is a fine-art screenprinter, have exhibited their collaborative images, which can be seen at [www.cooperartpoetry.com](http://www.cooperartpoetry.com).*



*I watch the way my brother  
lifts our mother from  
the wheelchair  
to the car,  
the shawl he lays  
across her lap.  
I save up every scrap  
of light,  
because I know that it will  
take  
each tiny consolation  
every day  
to mend the world.*



Robert F. Campbell

## *Kaddish*

Deborah Gordon Cooper

*All night long,  
like a ribbon  
through my sleep,  
I hear the pines  
keening,  
shawled giants, leaning  
with the wind,  
an ancient minyan.  
In dreams  
I see them bow,  
then arch their backs,  
tilt their great faces  
to the sky,  
praying for light  
against the darkness.*



## Love the God You Know, Know the God You Love

Richard Bauman



In my dream something caught my eye as I walked past the huge display window of a department store. In the lower left-hand corner of the glass was a small, round, white decal with a pale red cross in its center. Printed around its periphery were the words, "LOVE THE GOD YOU KNOW," "KNOW THE GOD YOU LOVE." Then I awoke. It was a curious dream and one that, with reflection, I saw as an invitation to come closer to God, to get to know Him and love Him as I never had.

I was raised in a Christian tradition that revered a critical God. The message I heard was that God kept an angel very busy recording every one of my many transgressions in His book of my life. I believed that God was more than just judgmental and punitive, but that He eagerly waited for me to make mistakes. My understanding was that there was no way to be good enough for God. If He allowed me into Heaven after I died, it would be done grudgingly. I felt he loved me the way a severely strict parent would, and I was told that one day

*Richard Bauman is a freelance writer from West Covina, California and author of the book, Awe-Full Moments: Spirituality in the Commonplace.*



I would understand and appreciate His stern love. When one knows that kind of God, one loves tentatively, at best.

Then a few years ago, on a spiritual retreat, I heard God described as the One who gently loves us, forgives us, and wants our happiness even more than we do. That was the God I had never known. It was shortly after that retreat that I had the decal dream.

Reflecting on coming to know God, and to love the God I've come to know, I see it as akin to being shown the truly loving actions of someone who always seemed unfeeling, uncaring, and aloof. Given insight into the true person, you're delighted with the discovery, and you want to see more. You start looking beyond the persona to get to know him or her. Hasn't that been the case for many of us in our relationship with God?

A lot of us grew up with what Reverend Tom Allender calls "silent praise." Things we did right generally weren't acknowledged by parents, teachers, and other authority figures. Our mistakes, however, were immediately brought to our attention. Even in things we did very well, the comments addressed what we had not done well. Rachel Remen, M.D., in her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, describes this well: "As a child, when I brought home a ninety-eight on an exam, he (her father) invariably responded, 'What happened to the other two points?'" It didn't take long for Remen to see that only when something was "perfect" was it worthwhile. Undoubtedly, many of us learned that God, also, was constantly asking, "What happened to the other two points?"

In the book *Your God is Too Small*, author J. B. Phillips, commenting on the notion of a critical, perfectionist God writes: "The concept of God which is based upon a fear relationship in childhood is not a satisfactory foundation

for an adult Christianity.” It is difficult to deeply love the God you know when the God you know is seen as always angry and constantly threatening punishment because we failed to be perfect. But God isn’t looking for perfection from us. As Phillips notes: “God is truly Perfection, but he is no Perfectionist . . .”

Ignorance breeds fear. So long as we remain ignorant of God as He really is, we will fear Him. Typically we see God as big, imposing, and powerful. But as I read more about God, and talked with others about their experiences with Him, the caring, understanding, loving God emerged. The more I learned about Him, the more I wanted to know about Him. The God I’ve come to love, by coming to know Him, loves me no matter what. He says to me, “Come deeper into knowledge of Me. Embrace Me, and let Me embrace you. Let Me fill you with trust, faith, and truth.”

By knowing the God you love, you become intimate with Him, and you learn where to find God. I used to look for Him in church every Sunday morning. Yes, He is there, but I now recognize that He is many other places, too, including within me. I wanted God to talk to me, but thought He never did. I was wrong—I just wasn’t listening. The Bible tells us God doesn’t always talk to us when, where, and how we expect Him to. For example, I Kings, 19:9 describes how Elijah goes to a mountain because he knows “the Lord is about to pass by.” As he waits for God, there is a powerful wind. God isn’t in the wind. After the wind there is a devastating earthquake. God isn’t in the earthquake. Then there is a fire. God isn’t in the flames. “And after the fire came a gentle whisper,” and that was when God passed by.

As we come to “love the God we know,” and “know

the God we love” we learn when and how He speaks uniquely to us, and equally important, how to hear Him. When we want to get to know someone better, how do we do it? By talking, listening, and spending time with the person. It is the same with God. C. Christopher Knippers, Ph.D., writes in his book *Common Sense, Intuition, and God’s Guidance*: “Spending time with God will bring security, confidence, patience, insight, joy, peacefulness, and love to your life. The more time you spend with God, the more you will experience Him, and your own unique relationship with him will develop.”

Prayer and meditation are superior ways to connect with our loving and kind God. As Knippers notes, “We don’t pray to get God’s attention, for we have it all the time. We pray to turn our attention toward Him.” When I pray, often my mind wanders. I used to berate myself for not concentrating on God. But have my thoughts really strayed from God? I see now that my mind often drifts to the things I need to talk about with God. Or perhaps it “wanders” to the things *He* wants me to ponder and discuss with Him.

We get to know God, too, by revealing ourselves to Him. I thought praying was the only way to get God to listen to me, but I’ve learned there are many ways to communicate with Him. I’ve learned that writing in my journal brings me closer to God. Writing letters to Him that reveal my angers, frustrations, joys, fears, disillusionments, and doubts works for me. As I write, God answers those letters, occasionally in dramatic fashion, with specific direction. More often it is through insights as to His will for me. We get to know God most easily by being honest with Him and ourselves. In *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning writes, “Getting honest with

ourselves doesn't make us unacceptable to God . . . but draws us to Him—as nothing else can—and opens us anew to the flow of grace.”

Knowing the God I love and coming to love Him more deeply has been a gradual process, begun tentatively, sometimes moving freely and easily, other times hesitantly and reluctantly, and still other times detouring and backtracking. It is far from perfect movement. Nonetheless, it has been forward movement overall, and as the saying goes about spiritual growth, “We get to measure our progress in inches, and then one day look back and see the miles we’ve come.”





*Sara Wuthnow*

# P R A Y E R S



## Let There Be Prayer

*Evelyn Frank Hanna*

Let us pray.

Let prayer be more than mere reverie;  
let it rupture the daily  
routine, rend the veil between  
earth and heaven.

Let prayer reach into the breach  
it opens, revealing the dazzle of divinity.

Let the pray-er erupt  
in holy laughter, led to rapture  
by merry prayer, pure revelry

Let prayer be revelation,  
its power squared unto infinity.

Let prayer ring out, resonant,  
till the reveille reverberates.

Let us approach the holy moment  
of glory, rapt in awe, apt  
to return as revenant, wholly changed.

Let us  
pray.

*Evelyn Frank Hanna's poetry has been published in numerous journals and her work has been honored in several contests.*

*Alan G. Schonfeld is a veterinarian, artist, and poet who lives in the Delaware Valley in Pennsylvania.*

# Prayer

*Alan G. Schonfeld*

As a prayer to the Beloved  
forms upon my lips . . .

I, in turn, become a prayer  
upon the face of the Beloved . . .

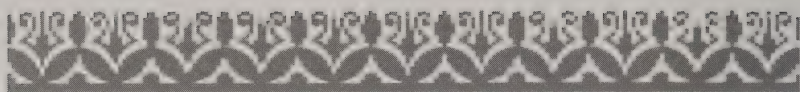
A prayer that has found expression  
with infinite variation

through any and all  
that has ever and will ever have taken breath

within the realm  
of all creation . . .

*Christian (date unknown)*

Forgive me, most gracious Lord and Father,  
if this day I have done or said anything  
to increase the pain of the world.  
Pardon the unkind word, the impatient gesture,  
the hard and selfish deed, the failure  
to show sympathy and kindly help  
where I have had the opportunity but missed it;  
and enable me so to live that I may daily  
do something to lessen the tide of human sorrow,  
and add to the sum of human happiness.



## Book Review

*Why the Mystics Matter Now:*

*Thomas Merton, Therese of Lisieux, Hildegard of Bingen,  
Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, Ignatius of Loyola,  
Catherine of Siena*

By Frederick Bauerschmidt

Sorin Books, 2003, 160 pgs.

[www.sorinbooks.com](http://www.sorinbooks.com)

Frederick Bauerschmidt introduces contemporary readers to the mystical writers, revealing their insights to be relevant and useful in a modern, hurting world. With an unconventional and engaging style, he strips away the unfamiliar, making the mystics more approachable, less intimidating.

Bauerschmidt starts where we are: in a disenchanted world that takes but does not give. He then draws just a few words from those particular mystics whose struggles and questions closely parallel our own, revealing the meaning of their words in accessible, practical ways. Thus, Therese of Lisieux speaks to us on the trial of faith, Ignatius of Loyola on discerning the authentic path, and Catherine of Siena on true generosity. And in a light, even playful tone, Bauerschmidt shows how the mystics are relevant to timely issues, such as ecology ("how to be green" from Hildegard of Bingen) and depression ("how to be blue" with Julian of Norwich).



This inviting, contemporary guidebook serves as a primer on the mystical writers. The insights of the mystics are relevant to the problems we face today, and Bauerschmidt opens the door to a body of wisdom that is often viewed as difficult and inaccessible.

*Frederick Bauerschmidt is Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola College in Maryland. He received his Ph.D. in Theology and Ethics in 1996 from Duke University and his M.A.R. in 1989 from Yale Divinity School. He is the author of numerous essays, articles, and book reviews, and of Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ (The University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). He recently completed two years as director of the Loyola International Nachbar Huis in Leuven, Belgium. He and his wife Maureen are the parents of three children.*

# END PIECE



## The Cracked Chalice

Susan Gregg-Schroeder

My friend Larry makes stunning and unique pieces of pottery. He freely shares his creations, letting others use his chalices and plates for worship. Sometimes he offers them for sale after a retreat or a conference.

As I passed by Larry's display table, I was inspired by the tall, stately chalices representing the tree of life; but what caught my attention was a much smaller chalice hidden behind the more attractive pieces. As I picked it up, I could see the cracks in the base where the clay had split due to the intense heat during the process of firing. I knew I had found my chalice! Having been through my own trials by fire, I know that I am that cracked and flawed vessel. But the Everywhere Spirit still finds ways to use me.

I often use my cracked chalice to hold a candle on a worship center I create for classes I teach. At one of those classes, the chalice was accidentally dropped and it broke in several places. One of the retreat participants, knowing how much the chalice meant to me, painstakingly glued each piece back in place. At the next class session, I was presented with a "whole" chalice.

The cracked chalice gets more chips and flaws over time, but I continue to use it to hold a candle. Each time the lighted flame dances in celebration, I am reminded that, no matter what happens in our lives, the Everywhere Spirit is present to bring restoration and healing, in spite of our many cracks.

*Susan Gregg-Schroeder is Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries for the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church and author of In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression. Please visit her online at Mental Health Ministries at <http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/>.*

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